

The Message of Buddhism and Its Glorification of Mankind

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The message delivered to the world by the Buddha Sakyamuni Gotama over two and a half millennia ago was primarily and essentially for mankind as a whole, irrespective of clan and creed differences. He had no chosen people of any specific region whom he wished or needed to favor. In the world of the Buddha, men and women were of equal status, with no insinuation whatsoever of inferiority either of intellect or in the possibility of spiritual attainments. As a teacher, the Buddha covered both realms of terrestrial and extra-terrestrial beings. It is for this reason that he came to be called the teacher of gods and men [*satthā devamanussānam*].

The genesis of this message to mankind came as a result of an observation said to have been made by young Siddhartha [born into this world as a human] while he was yet unenlightened and was only a Buddha aspirant or *bodhisatta*, pursuing his goal of enlightenment. In the physical world of human life, he saw a great deal more than others, i.e. you and I. This greater vision and keener insight, we are personally inclined to believe, was the result of a maturity of wisdom acquired through *samsāric* evolution. In the living process of being born, aging and decaying, of being subject to disease and dying, which in reality are no more than very natural processes, the young prince saw a genuine core of unsatisfactoriness or *dukkha* because of the unfailing and unacceptable trait of change lying within them.

It is our non-acceptance of these realities of life as they truly are and our inability to streamline ourselves against their harshness which bring the first category of pain or *dukkha* upon mankind. This puts the humans or the *loka* [i.e. the world] as our young aspirant to enlightenment calls the humans in this

context, in a very stressful situation - *kiccham vata ayam loko āpanno*. He did sense it and see it. But we, as average worldlings, are too dull-witted.

There was also behind this vision the inherited Indian belief that the human life process is cyclical and continuous. It is called *samsāra*. Death indeed does not terminate life. From death to death life goes on - *mrutyoh sa mrutyum āpnoti*. The very process of living, and its psychic acquisitions in this very phenomenon, propels life *ad infinitum*, i.e. ceaselessly. The greatness of young Siddhartha and his dauntless spirit of adventure is seen at this point when he challenges this situation. He is determined to terminate this process. He is convinced that it is in this termination that there lies the salvation of mankind. It is called the departure or the stepping out - *nissarana*. It is the departure from the painful process of continuance in life.

This is the goal of Nirvana. Here the painful process of being born again and again is ended - *Ayam antimā jāti. Natthi ' dāni punabbhavo*. So said the Buddha on discovering himself to be liberated. Speaking in a different idiom, it is said that at this stage the wheel of life turns no more - *yattha vaṭṭam na vaṭṭati*. Nirvana undoubtedly is an individual attainment. It is personal to each one. It is attainable in one's lifetime, here and now, if the needful has been done. Do not fail to appreciate that our Sakyamuni Buddha attained it at the age of thirty-five years and enjoyed its bliss for full forty-five years thereafter.

When the Buddha constantly says in his teachings that he preaches at all times two basic things, it is this concept of unsatisfactoriness in life or *dukkha* and its termination and elimination or *nirodha* - *dukkhañcāham paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodham* - that is highlighted. It is through a logical analysis of these two basic items, the search for the cause of *dukkha* and the way leading to its cessation that one arrives at the total set of Four Noble Truths.

Let us now turn to another area of this *dukkha* besides the physical one of birth, decay etc. The Buddha himself presents to us other psychic or mental areas of *dukkha* origin. Being torn off from the company of dear and loved ones

[*piyehi vippayogo*] as well as being pushed into the company of unloved ones [*appiyehi sampayogo*] bring about mentally painful stresses and strains. So is the inability to gain what one wishes for - *yam' p ' iccham na labhati tam' pi dukkham*. That is hope differed maketh the heart sick. This is a remarkably valuable insight, which Buddhism gives to mankind with regard to one's personal relations and their inevitable consequences. In this area of psychic grievances, the Buddha says that all modes of grasping at things of the world, the process being named *upādāna*, are equally productive of painful situations and lead to regeneration in a further *samsāric* continuance.

This, we wish to insist, is a remarkable insight into the reality of psychic phenomena in the world. In the area of human perceptual and cognitive activities, it is inestimably valuable to be forewarned about the consequences of these what appear to be normal processes of mental activities of humans. They are consequences in terms of the formation of our character or personality in our present life and also possibly in our lives to come. They appear to be normal and we choose to call them so in this context because they are the outcome of our reacting to sense stimuli received through our sense organs.

Five of these sense organs like the eye and the ear etc. are visibly located externally in our body. They literally bombard us all the time, both for attraction and repulsion in terms of our likes and dislikes. The mind as the sixth sense organ, located within, has a rich repertoire of built-in experience. In the regular cognitive process in our daily living, the formation of our judgements are directed by our acquired and stored up knowledge of the past which we call memory, possibly extending backwards, even to a life beyond the present or man more. This we call the trans-*samsāric* consciousness [*viññāna sota* or *samvattanika vinnāna*] which determines the quality of our lives from one birth to another.

We believe we have said so far enough to clarify the Buddhist position that every *samsāric* being is a product of his own creation. For each one, it is an individual self-wrought process at work, for personal elevation or degradation. There exist no place or person, within or without, who provides security to beings

of the world [*attāno loko*]. Nor is there anyone, according to Buddhism, who directs the destiny of the world [*anabhissaro*]. If you seek the one or the other, you could not do so without stepping out of Buddhism. In doing so one automatically ceases to be a true Buddhist in spirit, no matter what claim one puts forward for its justification. Buddhist texts in fact call such a person an outcast.

Buddhism definitely tolerates no religious bigamy of soliciting or entertaining alien leadership and guidance or *añña satthāra*. In Buddhism, there is no room for qualitative or quantitative elevation in life through divine grace or celestial intervention. Affluence, success and prosperity are always products of endeavor and enterprise [*uṭṭhātā vinadate dhanam*]. It is more honorable to take leave of Buddhism totally before embracing other alien divinities of your choice for favors, grants or whatever one wishes for.

It is this approach in Buddhism of giving every individual, man, woman or child the right to work out his or own salvation, without supplicating any external divinity and praying for grace that entitles it to be called anthropocentric in its process of religious development and glorification of man. Religious life of man as recommended in Buddhism gets him not only beyond the stresses and strains of life in the world as he lives here in our midst, but also redeems and elevates him, possibly here itself, to a state of transcendence which is well and truly above and beyond human.

It is the way of the Noble Eight-fold Path, worked out through eight successive stages, which brings humans, in their correctly acquired composure of the mind called *sammā samādhi*, to the threshold of wisdom called *sammā ñāna*. It is from here that one moves to the release in Nirvana, unmistakably known as *sammā vimutti*. This is the highest achievable elevation and glorification of man, woman and child to be liberated from being mortals in the painful process of *samsāra* and be admitted to the immortality, eternity and bliss of Nirvana. Call it by whatever name you will. The choice is yours. Once you have got there, you need names no more.